

Roquebrune (Alp. Marit.)
21/II/26.

Emotions Expressed in Wood

THE ART OF FERDINAND OPITZ



MOURNING WOMEN

carved in oak by Ferdinand Opitz.

WOOD-SCULPTURE possesses a very intimate appeal, both for the maker and for the beholder. It is a homely art, accomplished by simple tools and processes to which the material yields with a swiftness and readiness that marble and most kinds of stone do not possess. It may be pursued affectionately, and this is the impression that the figures in various



A MOURNFUL MAIDEN
carved in walnut.

woods made by Ferdinand Opitz produce.

In Prague, for many years, a fine school of classical sculpture has been presided over by a succession of good teachers who have also been good artists, and Myslbek, the author of some of the finest monuments in Bohemia, was one of the best of these. He it was who led the tendency to depart from strict classicism, and Ferdinand Opitz, who was his pupil, benefited by this cleavage, and with others founded the modern school of carving in Czechoslovakia, although he now belongs to Vienna. He was born in 1888, and travelled in Italy, Sicily, Germany and Egypt, mostly engaged in the study of carving, which he actually practised in London and Paris. In 1922 he became a member of the New Fellowship of Sculptural Artists in Vienna, and therefore definitely ranged himself with the advanced guard. By this time three of his important pieces had been acquired for the State Modern Gallery in Prague.

CARVING is one of the chief tenets of advanced sculpture, and Opitz restricts himself to this in stone and wood. But he has other principles, apart from technical ones: he is an expressionist and he is given to simplification. His aim is to express the maximum of motion with the mini-



THE PRODIGAL SON
carved in oak.

mum of elaboration. He succeeds. His figures are very simple in form, but very fruitful in suggestion. They possess an expressiveness completed by the elimination of over-form which discounts expression in the

result, and distracts the artist in the production.

This is one of the most pregnant things about post-impressionism. There is a return to nature and natural expression without mere

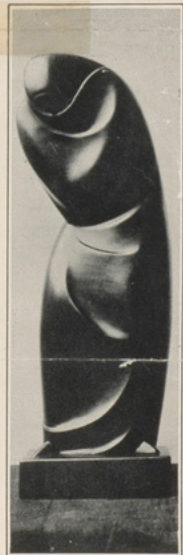


A DANCING GIRL
carved in pear-wood.

copying of natural forms. Yet all the striking little figures that come from the hands of Ferdinand Opitz have the air of nature, but it is the nature which is neither exaggerated, nor caricatured. His work is of too serious a character for caricature, a form which a great deal of the wood figure carving of the Scandinavians, the Swis and the Austrians take. He seizes on the deeper emotions of life, and with the really primitive means he allows himself to employ manages to express them with poignancy. Grief and Mourning are two of his subjects, and the simple curves and masses of his oaks "Mourning Women" and those of the "Mournful Maiden," in walnut, and a bowed figure in oak of "Grief," express more earnestly those emotions than most of the cold figures in marble of the neo-classic tradition. They are warm from the sensitive hand that carved their forms and gave them life. Simplicity of execution is extreme in the case of the "Shivering Woman"—a few structural curves of a cloak express adequately the idea that they cover and yet reveal. A strenuous figure of "Prayer,"

in limewood, with its yearning upward gesture of the hands, equally, if more dynamically, expresses the idea. The epical emotions of the return of "The Prodigal Son" are treated in two works: one a single pear-wood figure, the other in oak, a most excellent example of real expressionism, in which natural form is merged into the structure of a dual figure design.

Opitz is not entirely occupied with dolorous subjects; however, as his pear-wood "Dancer" and "Dancing Maidens," in relief, indicate. In these action is united with emotion, or rather emotion is expressed by emotional movement, and in the relief the artist comes as nearly to natural form as is at all likely. The reason for this is obvious: action expresses what is largely physical emotion, while in the other and more static pieces mentioned, the emotion is psychologically engendered. Opitz does not aspire to architectonic form; his work, although decorative in a special but subsidiary fashion, is expressional not only of ideas, but of the artist's personality: it is not only carved with nicety, but with individual affection, and what renders it so true and so convincing is its appropriateness to its material. Never does it look like stone or marble, nor plaster nor bronze: it is always authentically wood. KINLTON PARKES.



A SHIVERING WOMAN
carved in pear-wood.

Kinlton Parkes.